# Mushegh I Mamikonian

**(d. 377/378)**

## BRIEFING

Mushegh I Mamikonian (also spelled Mushel; d. 377/8) was an Armenian military officer from the Mamikonian family who occupied the hereditary office of sparapet (generalissimo) of the Kingdom of Armenia under the Arsacid kings Pap (r. 370–374) and Varazdat (r. 374–378). He took part in the Armenian resistance against the forces of the Sasanian monarch Shapur II (r. 309–379), notably taking part in the Battle of Bagavan, where the Iranian forces were defeated. He was the regent of Armenia under the young and inexperienced Varazdat, who eventually suspected him of posing a danger to his rule, and thus had him executed, in 377/8.

Mushegh may be identical with the Artabanes mentioned in the works of the contemporary Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus.

## BACKGROUND

Mushegh was a son of the Armenian sparapet (generalissimo) Vasak I Mamikonian. The Mamikonian family controlled the northwestern Tayk province near the Iberian border. They also hereditarily held the office of sparapet, which was the most important office after that of the king. Vasak was the leader of the pro-Roman party in Armenia which supported King Arshak II (r. 350–368). However, with the death of Roman emperor Julian at the Battle of Samarra in 363, Roman forces withdrew from Armenia, thus exposing it to the Sasanian Empire. This eventually forced Arshak II, as well as many Armenian nobles, such as Vasak, to leave for the Iranian court to pledge their allegiance to the Sasanian King of Kings (shahanshah) Shapur II (r. 309–379). However, Arshak II's refusal to accept Shapur II's demands resulted in his imprisonment in the Castle of Oblivion, while Vasak was tortured to death. With the elimination of Arshak II (who, according to Faustus of Byzantium, soon committed suicide, or, per Ammianus Marcellinus, was put to death), Shapur II sent his forces into Armenia.

Arshak II's widow, Queen Parandzem, organized a resistance and sent a delegation under Mushegh to the Romans to ask for help on the behalf of Arshak II's son Pap. The Romans, however, were reluctant to engage in a war and support Armenia, which had been devastated by the Iranian forces. In the winter of 369/370, Parandzem was killed by Iranian forces, while numerous sites, including the capital of Artaxata, were destroyed. Pap fled to Roman territory, and later returned in 371 with help from the Roman emperor Valens (r. 364–378), and Pap ascended the Armenian throne. In the same year, a combined Armenian-Roman army defeated the Iranians at the Battle of Bagavan. Mushegh, who took part in the battle, wounded the Albanian king Urnayr (a vassal of Shapur II), but allowed him to escape. The 5th-century Armenian historian Faustus gives a large amount of credit for the victory to Mushegh.

### Battle of Bagavan

The Battle of Bagavan (also spelled Bagawan), Battle of Dzirav (Armenian: Ձիրավի ճակատամարտ, romanized: Dziravi chakatamart) or the Battle of Vagabanta was fought in 371 near the settlement of Bagavan, in the district of Bagrevand in Greater Armenia, between a joint Roman-Armenian force and a Sassanid army, with the Romans and Armenians emerging victorious. It is recorded by the Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus, as well as the Armenian historian Faustus of Byzantium.

The Armenian historian Movses Khorenatsi and several later Armenian historians following him place the battle in a field called Dzirav, and so the battle is called the Battle of Dzirav in some Armenian sources. In the view of historians Hakob Manandian and Nina Garsoïan, this is an error by Khorenatsi or a conflation of the Battle of Bagavan with the battle at Gandzak described in the next chapter of Faustus's history.

#### *Background*

In the aftermath of the Perso-Roman peace treaty of 363, whereby Rome had pledged not to intervene in Armenian affairs, Armenia was left at the mercy of the Sassanid king Shapur II, who in 367/368 imprisoned the Armenian king Arshak II and strove to consolidate Persian rule in the country. In 369, the Roman emperor Valens allowed Pap, son of Arshak II, to return to Armenia accompanied by the general Terentius. However, Pap was soon driven out of Armenia by Shapur's armies and forced to hide in Lazica. While Pap was in hiding, Shapur contacted him and persuaded him to change his allegiance to Persia, but this attempted rapprochement was aborted when Valens's general Arintheus arrived and restored Pap to the Armenian throne a second time.

Shapur was enraged by this move, but did not declare the peace with Rome void until the winter of 370. Shapur amassed an army, which, according to Faustus, included the forces of his ally King Urnayr of Albania, and invaded Armenia in the spring of 371. Valens sent a large army to Armenia under the command of generals Traianus and Vadomarius, but with orders to engage only in defensive actions, hoping to maintain the peace with Persia. The Armenians also assembled their army under the command of sparapet (general-in-chief) Mushegh Mamikonian and convened with the Romans near the settlement of Bagavan, in the district of Bagrevand, at the foot of Mount Npat, near the source of the Arsanias River. Faustus gives the number of the Armenian army as 90,000.

***Battle***

The combined Armenian-Roman army met the invading Sassanid force near Bagavan. According to Ammianus Marcellinus, the Romans initially withdrew to avoid combat, but were eventually forced to respond to the attacks of the Persian cavalry and won a decisive victory in the subsequent battle, inflicting heavy casualties on the Persians. Faustus of Byzantium gives considerable credit for the victory to sparapet Mushegh Mamikonian. Faustus also tells of how Urnayr of Albania asked Shapuh to let his contingent face the Armenian force, and how Mushegh engaged in single combat with Urnayr and wounded the Albanian king, but allowed him to escape with his life. This may indicate that the battle took place in a similar fashion as other battles where the Romans and their allies faced the Persians and their allies, with the Romans facing the Persians and the allies fighting each other. According to Faustus, King Pap did not take part in the battle and observed from Mount Npat together with Patriach Nerses at the request of the Roman generals.

***Aftermath***

Ammianus writes that several other engagements were fought after the Armenian-Roman victory at Bagavan, with varying outcomes. Faustus tells of another great battle at Gandzak in Adurbadagan where the Armenians and Romans routed the Persians again, this time with Shapur there in person. After these battles, Shapur sent envoys and a truce was agreed upon. Shapur then returned to Ctesiphon and Valens to Antioch, with Armenia left effectively under Roman suzerainty. The truce would last for seven years. As a result of these victories, Mushegh is said to have reconquered many lost Armenian territories and forced the nobles who had revolted against the Arsacid monarchy to submit to Pap's authority.

With this victory, many of the Armenian nakharars (magnates) who had previously defected to Shapur II in 360s, were now under Mushegh's control. Mushegh, however, was greatly criticized by Pap for sparing Urnayr. However, they ultimately reconciled, with Pap providing Mushegh with many gifts, honors and villages.

When Urnayr returned to Albania, he sent a message to Mushegh thanking him for sparing his life, and also informed him of a surprise attack planned by Shapur II. According to Faustus, Mushegh assembled all the Armenian troops, which numbered about 90,000 According to Ian Hughes, "If P'awstos' numbers are correct, it would appear that for this conflict the entire army of Armenia was gathered to fight Shapur, leaving all other borders undefended – a risk that Pap and Mushegh were willing to take in face of the Persian threat." Mushegh was also reinforced by a Roman force led by Terentius. The Iranian army—led by Shapur II himself—was defeated and routed at the border near Ganzak. Mushegh and Terentius then left the hayr mardpet (grand chamberlain) Cylaces (Glak) with an army of 30,000 to protect the border. Cylaces soon sent messengers to Shapur, promising to betray Pap, Mushegh, and Terentius to the Iranians. However, this ploy was discovered by Pap, who had Cylaces assassinated.

According to Faustus, Mushegh reclaimed several of Armenia's former territories after the battles with the Persians, including the southern principalities of Arzanene and Corduene, which had been ceded to the Persians by Jovian in 363. Faustus writes that Mushegh brutally punished the provinces that had revolted against the monarchy, forcing the pro-Persian nakharars to submit to royal authority. Mushegh is also said to have campaigned against the neighboring kingdoms of Iberia and Albania to restore the Kura River as Armenia's northeastern border. However, the actual extent of Mushegh's reconquests is uncertain and likely exaggerated by Faustus.

Peace was subsequently made between Iran and Rome, with Armenia becoming a protectorate of the latter once more. However, in 374 or 375, Pap was murdered at the behest of Valens due to his disobedience towards the Roman emperor. The Romans then installed another Arsacid named Varazdat on the Armenian throne, with Mushegh becoming his regent. In 377, Valens was forced to call his forces in Armenia back to wage war with the Goths, which quickly resulted in the destabilization of Armenia. Varazdat, who was young and impressionable, was by convinced by a group of Armenian nobles that Mushegh posed a danger to his rule, and had played a part in Pap's murder. Varazdat therefore had Mushegh killed at a banquet and appointed his tutor (dayeak) Bat Saharuni as the new sparapet, in violation of tradition. Mushegh's family and relatives put his body on a high tower, believing that the spirits (aralez) would descend and bring him back to life.

According to historian Hakob Manandian's interpretation, Mushegh and the pro-Roman party had lost faith in the viability of the Arsacid monarchy and decided to solidify Roman presence in the country at the expense of monarchical authority, specifically through the establishment of Roman fortified settlements throughout Armenia. Manandian argues that this policy would have ultimately resulted in Armenia's annexation by Rome, and that Varazdat's enmity with Mushegh was the result of the pro-Roman party's policy and the king's efforts to preserve royal authority. After Mushegh's murder, his kinsman Manuel Mamikonian returned from captivity in Iran and drove Varazdat out of the country to avenge Mushegh. Manuel spared the life of the young king, but killed Bat Saharuni. Manuel then placed Varazdat's young cousins Arshak and Vagharshak on the throne.

Mushegh may be identical with the Artabanes mentioned in the works of the contemporary Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus. Both were military officers; both are said to have led the negotiations with Valens which resulted in Pap's return to Armenia; and both were accused of treason. However, Mushegh was murdered after Pap's death, while Artabanes was killed by Pap's orders on suspicion of treason.

Lenski believes that Artabanes may be identified with aspects of two of the Mamikonian sparapets mentioned by Faustus for this period: Mushegh and Vahan Mamikonian, the Apostate. Similarly, Robert Bedrosian suggests that in Faustus's account, Artabanes is split into the figures of Mushegh and Vahan, with the former remaining loyal to the monarchy and the latter collaborating with the Persians, thus "spreading the responsibility" for Artabanes's duplicitous actions. Bedrosian explains the difference in timing of the deaths of Mushegh and Artabanes as a reflection of Faustus's biases; in Faustus's account, Mushegh cannot be killed by Pap, a true Arsacid ruler, so the murder is instead attributed to his successor Varazdat, whom Faustus describes as illegitimate.